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SUBJECT: BLACK AND BLUE, BAVARIA'S CSU SEEKS NEW RELEVANCE

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) The September 27 Bundestag election showed that the Christian Social Union (CSU) of Bavaria has lost its nimbus as a regional superpower in Germany. The CSU will remain a U.S. ally in foreign and security policy fields. Its focus, however, will mainly be on economic and social issues, and it could serve as a foil in a business-friendly "black-yellow" federal coalition. Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, a wildly popular politician not yet forty, is the most powerful CSU figure in Berlin. Eclipsing Bavarian Minister President Seehofer, he will lead the fight to protect CSU influence in the new government. End Summary.

A New CSU Strategy: Modern or Traditional?

¶2. (SBU) Winning just 42.6 percent of the vote in the Bundestag elections, the CSU today is at its lowest ebb, even below its "disastrous" 43.4 percent in the 2008 state election and far from its 2005 Bundestag election result (49.3 percent). According to a poll on election eve September 26, seventy-five percent of Bavarians "did not believe the CSU was credible," the worst result of all political parties and one that shocked the CSU party powerful. Despite Seehofer's highly publicized efforts over the past year to attract more youth and women, the party has only six women out of 45 deputies in the Bundestag, down by three from 2005 -- one possible reason for its loss in credibility. Rival CSU camps have proposed solutions. One CSU board member and European Parliamentarian has argued for a return to traditional, Christian-conservative roots such as with women raising children at home. Others want to continue Seehofer's rejuvenation reforms. The "Young Group" of the CSU Landtag caucus in Munich wants to turn the CSU into a progressive party. "Being conservative," Landtag deputy Markus Blume says, "means marching on top of progress."

¶3. (SBU) The CSU may also try to promote its social market views to gain strength. In a coalition with the CDU and FDP, the CSU will be able to profile itself as the defender of a strong state versus "liberal" permissiveness and of the interests of the "little people" versus "cold market liberalism." Seehofer knows how to play the "social conscience" card, although doing so against the FDP in the election backfired.

The CSU Generational Change is Underway

¶4. (SBU) Since taking office, Seehofer (aged 60) has planted the seeds to rejuvenate the party, placing up-and-coming politicians in the Bavarian cabinet and even paving the way for his own succession. He is dramatically weakened, however, after leading the party to its worst showing in history, party insiders and commentators agree. The most popular CDU/CSU politician by far, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, at age 37, sits in Berlin as Economic Minister, not in Munich. CSU insiders expect him to focus his time and talents on Berlin jobs and increasing his Berlin influence. He is not expected to try to become Minister President, a CSU senior advisor told us on September 30. The advisor said that Seehofer would lead the coalition negotiations in Berlin but implied with a smile that zu Guttenberg "would be prominent at the table."

CSU, a U.S. Ally with Weak Foreign Policy Credentials

¶5. (SBU) Even though it represented a state and not a country, for decades the CSU focused on foreign affairs when the Soviet Union was at the border. Franz Josef Strauss was the legendary CSU leader in Germany and Europe from the 1960's to 1980's, but for leadership today, the CSU has few foreign policy experts and its foreign policy credentials are thin. Zu Guttenberg and Christian Schmidt, State Secretary in the Ministry of Defense, stand out both in Germany and Washington. However, in the new government Zu Guttenberg will not become Foreign Minister and Schmidt may keep his position but not move up, CSU contacts tell us. The CSU hopes for a third portfolio and CSU caucus chairman Peter Ramsauer might become Minister for Economic Cooperation, which would give the CSU some say in foreign policy matters.

¶6. (SBU) On foreign policy issues, despite its lack of depth the CSU should remain a U.S. ally. A CSU contact told us on September 30 that the CSU will hold the course in Afghanistan, defend against Free Democratic Party (FDP) moves to abolish compulsory military service, and argue for better military equipment and a larger budget for the Defense Ministry. That said, CSU failed to support the U.S. when it came to Bavaria's accepting Guantanamo detainees; this may not change.

Refocusing on Local Issues

¶7. (SBU) Political, economic, and demographic evolution in the Bavaria have over the years displaced foreign affairs as a major organizing principal for the state's main political party, replacing that with overt economic and social concerns. State chancery contacts have confirmed to us since the election that, given Seehofer's own social background, his emphasis is not on foreign policy. Rather, he will shift the CSU's focus to take on the role of the "social conscience" of the black-yellow government coalition.

In Bavaria, the CSU contends with five viable political rivals - FDP, SPD, Freie Waehler, Greens, and the Left - and Bavarians seem happy to see the erstwhile "boss" forced to rule in a coalition with the FDP. Given the fact that the CSU is mostly responsible for the

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CDU/CSU losses nationwide, it has to try to get along with the coalition partners while seeking its new footing in Munich and Berlin.

¶8. (U) Consulate General Munich coordinated this report with Embassy Berlin.

¶9. (U) Track Munich reporting at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Germ> any.
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